

NARRATOR'S NOTES:  
BIG TOP AMERICA - In The Beginning

Circus Historians generally point to an Englishman named Philip Astley as "Father of the Circus".

Sometime in 1770, this gentleman began performing before audiences in London as a horseback rider. With spectators sitting around a circular arena he performed tricks unlike anything they had previously experienced. Later he added features such as Clowns, Acrobats and Tight-rope walkers to enhance the entertainment.

In time similar Equestrian-based performances began appearing throughout England as well as on the Continent. It was inevitable that ultimately such Shows would be duplicated in North America.

Scene 1:

John Bill Ricketts arrived in the Colonies from Scotland in 1792. He had trained as an Equestrian in England so soon opened what is generally regarded as the original American Circus at a site in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 3, 1793. Extra entertainment included a Clown and Tight-rope walker.

Eventually Ricketts persuaded George Washington to loan him one of his own favorite horses, a white